VI. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Family

594 The Tanala family consists of a man, his wife or wives and their children. Among the Menabe the father is, in theory, the absolute head of the family with authority over the persons and property of not only his own children but his sons' children as well. Actually his authority varies with his personality and I even found a few cases in which fathers had been deserted by their children and reduced to want. Sons are not considered heads of families until after their father's death. Among the Ikongo authority over the children seems to be vested in the mother, while control of the family property is vested in the father. Such a condition might easily arise in a group which was in transition from a matriarchal system with communal [591] ownership to a patriarchal one with individual ownership. In both groups the whole family, including married sons, normally lives together in part of the ward belonging to their lineage (see The Village).

592 595 Although no exact figures are available, at least two-thirds of the Menabe families seem to be monogamous. Polygyny is common, but is only possible to a man with some wealth and social prestige. Among the Ikongo, polygyny is somewhat commoner, but by no means universal. In both cases each wife has her own house, built by the husband at the time of their marriage. In all but two or three of the Menabe gentes the husband must spend one day with each wife, in regular rotation. On that day he assists her and sleeps in her house. If he stays with one wife on another's day, the injured wife is entitled to divorce with alimony (see Divorce). She usually waives this, but the husband must make her a public apology and a substantial present. Among the Ikongo, who hold land individually, each wife is assigned a share of the husband's land. He has to help her to cultivate this on her day, while she feeds herself, her children, and the husband while with her, from its produce. The first wife is called the *Vady Be*, the second *Vady Ivo*, and the third *Vady Masay*. There is no special term for additional wives and a man rarely has more than three. The *Vady Be*, who is always the first wife married, is superior to the others socially and helps the husband to administer the family finances. Often she holds the family purse for current expenses and the others, including the husband, have to apply to her for money. Wives pride themselves on economy and good manage-